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## REVIEWS

### THAT WILDER EARTH

*Wild Earth and Other Poems*, by Padraic Colum. Henry Holt & Co.

Padraic Colum is one of the most gifted, if not the most gifted, of the younger Irish poets. James Stephens, I think, has never surpassed his first small book, *Insurrections*. Was it not more distinctive, was it not more Irish, than any that he has published since? Some of the other younger Irish poets have seemed to echo Mr. W. B. Yeats, as was indeed quite natural; but Mr. Colum by no means wears the mantle of the older poet. Whereas Mr. Yeats' own dreams are usually reflected in his poems representing peasant life, or whereas Mr. Yeats almost always sees the peasant through the glamour of "old mythologies," Mr. Colum gives us the peasant as nearly as possible in the peasant's own terms, and with a direct, concrete touch. Of course the distinction is not water-tight, nor meant to be. Mr. Yeats' old woman making the fire at dawn, when "the seed of the fire gets feeble and low," is as direct as possible; and Mr. Colum's poems are not untouched by the glamour of tradition and "the thought of white ships and the King of Spain's daughter." How else could it be, and he a poet?

However, the reader who turns to Mr. Colum's poems with this distinction in mind will realize something of his

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artistic method. He has identified himself with his subject, and his own personality is not obtruded except as it is incidentally revealed. This is the method of genuine "folk" poetry—be it Greek or Irish or of any race at all. Such poetry has the solidity of life, of the hills or of the earth itself, and the title *Wild Earth* is indeed appropriate. This title, it may be mentioned, is taken from a smaller collection of poems, a little brown book issued by Maunsel in 1909, which I remember with regret—I lent it to a lady who was expecting a visit from Padraic Colum. According to her, he took the book and cut it up for copy for the present volume! In this edition I therefore recognize something of my own lost property in several of the poems. Among these are *A Ploughman*, *A Drover*, and *An Old Woman of the Roads*, which have been quoted in several anthologies.

I do not mean to indicate by what I have said that Mr. Colum's poems are entirely objective, or that, being objective in method, they do not serve to convey subjective and personal emotions. There are many beautiful poems in the book that give us the sense of personal vision and passion. *The Wayfarer* (published in POETRY) is one of these. There is much primal feeling—I know no other way to name it—in all that this poet writes. His poems take hold of earth and do not let go. This is a feeling which does not recognize division between nature and man or between man and man. It is a feeling which makes ridiculous the publisher's paragraph on the cover of this book: "The poems in this volume are among the best recent attempts to get into the hearts of

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the simplest poor, to exalt them by truth and not by condescension. They express no surprise at finding greatness in the humble." Isn't that paragraph appalling? Yes—appalling.

The Irish have that tenacity of primitive feeling and understanding of life, that depth which makes culture possible, which is retained by only a few peoples, as against system and efficiency and all that sterilizes experience, characteristic of the dominant nations today. This is what makes Irish literature so rich and vital when it is consistently self-expressive. Poets of other races seem to have to acquire, or to be especially gifted with, what an Irishman has naturally—a sense, that is, of the real values of life, which easily becomes poetic, as against an artificially fostered appreciation, which may be merely literary. If the smaller races are doomed in the general trend of what we call civilization, then civilization is that much poorer.

Among the new poems published in this book, *The Old Men Complaining*, with its hint of Mr. Yeats' old men by the thorn trees, but in an entirely original vein, is one of the finest. It gives us the old men railing against the waste, luxury and idleness of youth—an eternal theme:

I heard them speak—  
The old men heavy on the sod,  
Letting their angers come  
Between them and the thought of God!

*The Three Spinning Songs* and *The Ballad of Downal Bawn* have delightful rhythm. In short, Mr. Colum is an artist with the conscientiousness of a thorough craftsman, and his

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touch is always authentic. I have not mentioned his humor, which makes him doubly sympathetic—of course there is no real sympathy without humor; but that goes without saying. His work is a definite contribution to Irish literature; it is a permanent contribution to English poetry. *A. C. H.*

MORE STORIES IN VERSE

*Livelihood*, by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson. Macmillan Co.

Those who have enjoyed Mr. Gibson's other books will find their expectations not disappointed in *Livelihood*, with its friendly working people, its stories of their hardships, their fortitude and humble satisfactions.

There is a certain monotony in the poet's method of story-telling. His dramatic instinct and experience lead his plots toward compactness, but otherwise have a limiting, cramping influence. An adherence to the old "dramatic unities" seems to dominate the poems. Each story may show on its stage only one period of time, one place of action; and more than that, the author, for further bondage, has added an extra unity of his own: that the characters in the story be limited to one. The other characters appear through this one, through his meditating recollection. It is through this meditation that we learn of the character's past life, what he has been before the curtain rose: after it has risen the hero is alone on the stage, save for the wraiths that outline themselves from his talk; and the scene does not change. One scene, one character: that is the rule. Two of the sketches